NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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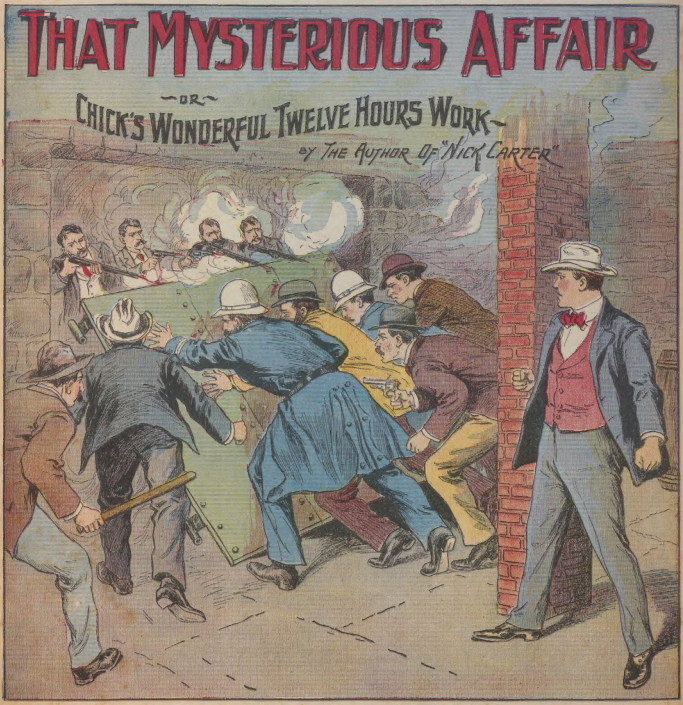
No. 492 NEW YORK, JUNE 2, 1906. Price, Five Cents

THAT MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR

—OR— CHICK'S WONDERFUL TWELVE HOURS WORK—

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



Jernigan and his men ducked behind the iron partition and the shots flew harmlessly over their heads, while Chick was fortunately at that instant protected by the brick.

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That Mysterious Affair;

OR,

CHICK'S WONDERFUL TWELVE HOURS WORK.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

(NOTE: This story was edited by Nick Carter in person. The reader will understand why.)

CHAPTER I.

A VILLAINOUS TRAP.

Two months elapsed after the conclusion of that interesting case which was entered in the detective's books under the heading, "The Gold-Lettered Dagger," and in the rush of other business which followed upon it Nick Carter had forgotten it—as nearly as he ever forgot any of his cases—when it was suddenly brought forcibly to his mind again by a startling and unexpected incident.

It happened at two o'clock in the morning.

The detective had just returned to his home, and had not yet retired, when the front door-bell rang out sharply, and continued to ring, as if the summons were imperative.

He replied to it in person, and found awaiting him on the door-step two policemen in uniform, both of whom were unknown to him. This latter fact was, however, not surprising, because there had of late been a great many new appointees on "the force," and there were, therefore, a great many policemen in the city with whom he had no sort of acquaintance.

"Well?" asked the detective; and one of the policemen replied:

"Are you Mr. Carter?"

"Yes."

"May we step inside for a moment?"

"Certainly."

The detective stepped back, thus permitting the two men to enter; and then, having turned on the electric switch which connected with the reception-room, he motioned them to enter. Then he waited in silence for them to state their business.

The officer who had spoken before now extended a card toward the detective. It contained merely a written address—nothing more—and referred to a number in Eighty-first Street.

"Is that address familiar to you, Mr. Carter?" asked the policeman.

The detective nodded his head.

"Quite," he replied. "What of it?"

"May I ask if you have visited that house recently? In fact, if you have been there to-night?"

"You may, if you will first tell me why you ask it. I am not in the habit——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Carter. I have no intention to offend. I ask the questions because I was ordered to do so by the captain. He wished me to ask you particularly to state, if you would do so, the date of your last call at that house."

Nick Carter smiled broadly, although there was a serious expression in his eyes, too, for the address was the home of Princess Olga Survanieff, and he wondered if this roundabout method of questioning him had anything directly to do with her.

"But these are new officers on the force," he argued to himself, "and doubtless they feel the importance of their errand," so he replied aloud:

"I think it is very nearly two months since I was inside that house, and since I have seen any of the occupants of it. Now, tell me at once why you choose to indulge in all this mystery, or I shall be obliged to ask you to excuse me from further conversation."

"There has been a murder in that house to-night, Mr. Carter—possibly two of them," said the policeman, like one who repeats a lesson.

"A murder?" repeated the detective, now thoroughly startled. "Who? Who was killed?"

"We are not yet quite sure about that."

"Was it the princess?"

"We do not know. We have received no direct information on that point, sir."

The detective was rapidly becoming exasperated.

"What in blazes is the matter with you fellows, anyway?" he demanded. "Why don't you tell me what you are here for? Does your captain wish me to go there? But it makes no difference whether he does, or not; I shall go, just the same."

"Yes, sir. He wishes you to go with us at once. We have a hack at the door."

"Then why didn't you say so in the first place? I'll call my assis——"

The policeman who had acted all along as spokesman put out one hand, and interrupted the detective.

"Pardon me," he said. "That is just what the captain did not wish you to do."

"What do you mean?" asked Nick.

"He wished, particularly, that you would come alone. He has a particular reason for it."

"Oh! He has, eh? Well, all right. I suppose he knows what he is about—though it is rather an unusual proceeding on his part, I must say."

"Yes, sir; he realized that. He begged that you would not take offense until you had seen him."

"All right," replied Nick. "Come along. I'm ready."

Now, for the sake of what is to follow, it is important that the reader should recall two facts. The first is that at the time the bell rang Nick Carter had just returned to his house, at two o'clock in the morning, and the other is that he had not yet gone up-stairs.

As the hack, with its three passengers, was speeding up-town, Nick began to ask some questions on his own account—and it did not occur to him at the time how evasive the replies of the two officers were. Or, rather, of one of them, for his companion seemed to have nothing to say at all.

"Tell me, now," he said, "who it is who has been killed."

"We do not know," was the reply.

"You have not been inside the house, then?"

"No; neither of us."

"Well, you have probably got hold of some idea of the facts, haven't you?"

"Only that the victim is a young woman."

"And beautiful?"

"Yes."

"You were not told that it was the princess?"

"No; but I think that is the idea."

"What time was the crime committed?"

"Only a short time ago."

"Why did you say, when I first admited you to my house, that there were probably two murders, instead of one?"

"Because I was told that there were evidences there pointing to a second crime, although the body had not been found."

"The princess kept a maid; it might be the maid who is dead."

"It might."

"Who is in charge up there now?"

"The captain was there when we came away—and I think the sergeant came in just as we were leaving."

"I thought you said you had not been to the house."

"I said, Mr. Carter, that neither of us had been inside the house."

"Ah, yes; to be sure."

They rode on in silence after that, for the detective had decided in his own mind that the two men who faced him across the hack were either utterly stupid, or else they had received orders that they were to give no information whatever.

He knew well enough that there are often occasions when it is important to give such orders, and he began to think that the captain of the precinct had determined that the detective should receive it first hand.

If this were true, Nick felt that he was not sorry.

The ride was tedious, and seemed much longer than it

really was; but at last the hack turned into the street where the crime had been committed, and was driven rapidly to the door of the house.

The detective was somewhat surprised to notice that there were no policemen around the place at all, and that, save for a light in the hall and one that shone through drawn shades on the second floor, there were no evidences of life about the place.

"They seem to have kept the fact of the murder mighty quiet," he said, as they descended from the vehicle.

"Captain's orders," replied the policeman laconically.

As Nick mounted the front steps in advance of his two companions, the door opened to receive him, and in the dim light of the hall he could discern the uniform of a third policeman.

He stepped through quickly, and, as he did so, the uniformed man who was in the hall turned and preceded him up the stairs.

"This way, Mr. Carter, if you please," was all he said; and it was only a pretense of a salute that he gave before turning.

But the detective followed him, without a word, until they were at the top of the stairs; and then he asked:

"Where is your captain, officer?"

"He is in the front room, sir. I was to take you directly to the scene of the crime first. After you have looked over the ground, he wishes to discuss it with you before information is given out to anybody else."

"Humph!" said Nick. "Go ahead."

The man opened the door into the rear room of that floor, and stepped aside, for the detective to enter.

Afterward, it seemed as if these men must have known exactly the methods upon which the great detective worked, for not one of them followed him at once into the room.

The scene was not an uncommon one to Nick Carter.

The room itself was arranged as a library. A drop-light burned on a center table. Some leather-covered chairs were scattered around the room. A big, heavy couch was between the windows, and upon this couch was lying the body of a young woman.

At first glance, the detective supposed her to be the princess; but, as he looked again, he saw that this was not so; she was evidently a stranger, or, at least, as far as he was himself informed, she did not belong in the house.

The hilt of a dagger protruded from the lace above her corsage, for she was fully dressed in evening costume; but beyond that fact one might have supposed that she had dropped asleep where she was lying.

The detective stepped forward until he was half-way between the door and the table, and a little to one side, so that he could readily see past it, and there, according to his invariable custom when he had a matter of this kind to investigate, he halted, while with his eyes he surveyed every corner and crevice of the room.

The dagger he noticed at once, for it was the same sort of weapon that had been prominent in the case of "The Gold-Lettered Dagger;" but he turned his eyes from that, determined to leave it until later; he wished to gather every other detail of the room together in his mind before he gave his attention directly to the murder itself.

So absorbed did he become that he did not know that one of the men was approaching him stealthily from behind.

He had no idea of such a thing until suddenly there was a swishing sound in the air almost directly over his head.

He heard it then, and half turned; only to receive a crushing blow, which felled him to the floor like a stricken ox.

And that was all that Nick Carter could recall of this remarkable adventure, although it was in nowise so remarkable as that which followed immediately after it.

But that shall be told in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

A MOST MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR.

All this which has just been told took place between two and three o'clock in the morning; *at half-past three* a telephonic message was received at police headquarters, which informed the officials there that something terrible had happened at the house in Eighty-first Street, which has already been described.

This message was followed immediately afterward by several others of the same character.

Each of the messages came from reputable persons, who resided along that block—from the houses on either side of the one indicated, from one across the street—and so on.

In effect, the messages conveyed the intelligence that there had been several shots fired inside the house; that there had been screams and cries of murder; that a woman had leaned from one of the front windows, and called for help—and, in short, that something terrible must have happened there to cause all the commotion.

The result of this was that orders were at once telephoned to the precinct station-house to go to the scene of the trouble without delay, and to enter the house by force, if necessary, and that two detectives were also hurried there from headquarters itself.

When the house was reached, a furious ringing of the bell brought no response, and, waiting only long enough to assure themselves that there was little or no probability that the summons would be answered, the doors were burst open, and the officers entered the house.

Everything was dark.

There was not a glimmer of light anywhere, but it did not take the officers long to light the gas from room to room, and from floor to floor.

At first there was nothing to be seen.

The parlor floor presented a perfectly natural appearance; but, when the officers ascended to the second floor, they nearly stumbled over the body of a woman, which was lying directly across the top of the stairs.

When the officer who was in advance of the others bent over her she moved a little, and moaned; and then, as the officer sought to raise her from the floor, she opened her eyes, and looked at him in affright.

Then, as if suddenly discovering that the man wore a uniform, and was, therefore, a policeman, who had come to her assistance, she sat bolt upright, and, in a sobbing voice, exclaimed:

"Thank Heaven! Oh, it is terrible! It is awful!"

"What is terrible? What is awful?" he asked her.

"Everything! Everything!"

For a moment she rocked back and forth, moaning and crying; and then, appearing suddenly to rouse herself, she pointed to the door of the rear room, and exclaimed:

"Go in there! Go in there! See for yourselves what that terrible man has done!"

The officer needed no further urging.

He sprang past the woman, who now staggered to her feet, and opened the door she had indicated.

Here, as in the other parts of the house, all was in darkness; and when the officer started forward to find the gas-jet, he again stumbled over a body, or bodies, that were lying prone upon the floor.

But he passed them quickly, and struck a light, and, as he did so, three other officers crowded in at the doorway, and stood there appalled by what they saw.

Now, reader, bearing in mind what *we* saw in the last chapter, we must look upon the scene that was presented to these policemen when they entered the room.

The library table, in the middle of the room, had been overturned; the drop-light upon it had been shattered into bits; the corpse of a woman arrayed in evening dress—the same one that we have seen—was huddled upon the floor. Her clothing was torn; there was blood upon it; there was a dagger buried in her bosom just above her corsage.

But more than that!

Now there was the hand of a man grasping the hilt of that dagger; the left hand of the same man was clutched firmly around the woman's throat. It was all as if he had first half choked her, and so forced her to the floor, and had then deliberately stabbed her.

And that man, my reader, was *Nick Carter!*

He was also apparently dead.

Blood had escaped from a wound just above one temple; there was a slashing cut across the back of his right hand, which held the knife; he was dressed only in his trousers, shirt, and stockings. In other words, his coat, vest, collar, cuffs, and shoes had been removed.

Such was the scene the officers came upon when they entered that room. Is it any wonder that they halted in utter amazement at what they saw? That they stood appalled?

To three of them, at least, Nick Carter was personally known—and they recognized him instantly.

They supposed at first that he was also dead, but when they bent down to examine him they discovered not only that he was breathing, but that he was saturated with the smell of liquor.

The woman with the dagger in her bosom was undoubtedly dead; Nick Carter was apparently only stunned, and also—apparently—stupefied with drink.

And now they heard a half scream from behind them, and, as they turned to discover its source, the woman whom they had found in the hall near the stairs rushed past them, and threw herself—or, rather, tried to do so—upon the corpse of the murdered girl. But one of the officers caught and held her before she had quite accomplished the act.

But, nevertheless, she cried out, seemingly in an ecstasy of grief and rage:

"Oh, my poor Yvonne! My poor Yvonne! That brute killed you! He murdered you before my eyes! And you gave up your life for me! You sacrificed yourself to save me!"

Then she broke into a passionate fit of weeping, and half swooned in the arms of the officer who held her.

And now it was noticed for the first time that she was only half clothed.

It is true that she wore a wrapper, and that there were slippers on her feet; but her hair was disheveled, as if she had been suddenly roused from sleep, and, indeed, her entire appearance was that of one who had been suddenly called from her bed, and had hastily donned wrapper and slippers.

The officers tried to question her, but she was incoherent in her agonized grief.

She only moaned over and over again:

"Yvonne is dead! She died to save me! That brute killed her! I saw him do it! She was defending me! He forced his way into the house! He was intoxicated! I was alone at the time, and then Yvonne came! She came just in time! She tried to defend me, and he killed her! He fired his pistol two or three times, to frighten her, but she would not be frightened! Then he flung the pistol from him, and caught her by the throat! *See!* There is the pistol over there!" and she pointed toward one side of the room.

"Yvonne tried to scream when he seized her. It was then that I rushed into the room. I saw him take that terrible dagger from his belt! *See!* You can see the

belt and the sheath that held the dagger still fastened around him! I saw him raise it!"

Again she cried aloud in her agony, and one of the officers commanded her to go on.

"I saw him raise the dagger. I looked around me for a weapon of some sort. I hardly know what I did, but somehow I seized the brass fire-tongs from the rack at the grate.

"And then—oh, Heaven! Oh, Heaven! He stabbed Yvonne! He stabbed her! I saw him do it! I must have struck him at the same time, for they both fell to the floor!

"I was frenzied. I did not know what to do. I could not think.

"I only know that I ran through to the front of the house, and called aloud for help; and then, as nobody seemed to answer me, I started for the street.

"I don't remember what happened then. I must have fainted. I remember no more until I discovered the policeman bending over me."

"But who are you, madam? You have not told us that yet," demanded one of the headquarters detectives.

"I am Olga Survanieff, a Russian princess, exiled from my country," she replied, more calmly than she had spoken before.

"And who is this dead woman?"

"She was Yvonne Blavatski, a distant relative of mine. She acted in the capacity of my maid, although, in reality, she was my dear friend, and more to me than a sister."

While all this was happening, some effort had been made to arouse Nick Carter from his stupor, but it proved utterly unavailing. He seemed to be dead to the world, if not in fact.

"Chuck him upon that couch, and clap the irons on him, too," ordered one of the detectives roughly. "He's a dangerous man to run amuck among us, if he should happen to wake up suddenly. Besides, he's quite capable of playing all that stupefication act."

Two of the men were sent out to notify the coroner, and two more were directed to carry Nick Carter outside the house, and place him in the patrol-wagon, which had brought a part of the policemen to the scene; and then the captain of the precinct turned to the woman who called herself Olga Survanieff.

"It will be necessary, madam, for you to appear against the prisoner in the morning. Do you require a doctor? Shall I send for one?"

She thanked him, but declined; and he added:

"Then, if you will retire to your own room, I will see to it that you are not disturbed again until it is time to make the formal charge. In the meantime, two of my officers will remain on guard in the house."

"Oh, thank you, captain."

"Is there anything that I can do for you? Would you like me to send for a trained nurse, to keep you company?"

"There is nothing, thank you. This is not the first time I have witnessed death by violence. In my own poor country——"

"Yes, yes; I know. If you should require anything, call upon one of the officers."

"Thank you. I will do so."

It was then that the captain and the two detectives from the central office descended to the parlor, to await the arrival of the coroner, or his assistant.

"Who would have believed it of Nick Carter?" asked the captain, after a long silence, during which all had been thinking deeply.

"I'm blowed if I *do* believe it!" replied one of the detectives, with some heat.

"Nor I," said the other one. "Honestly, cap'n, do you?"

"It looks mighty dark against him," replied the captain, shaking his head dubiously.

"The evidence seems conclusive enough," admitted the detective who had spoken first. "But, all the same——"

He stopped.

"All the same—what?"

"I can't help thinking that there is some devil's work here somewhere."

"The woman tells a straight story."

"I can't deny that, sir."

"And there was Carter. You saw him, as well as I."

The others nodded.

"He had his hand on her throat; the other hand was around the hilt of the dagger; there was the revolver, with three chambers empty; there is his general appearance, the smell of whisky, the cut on his head, the brass tongs on the floor beside him, where the woman dropped them after she struck him. It looks mighty black against him to me."

"But, great heavens, man, *he is Nick Carter!*"

"That has nothing to do with it—and Nick Carter, drunk, might be as crazy as any other man in that condition."

"But did you ever see Nick Carter drunk?"

"No."

"There's a nigger in the wood-pile somewhere, captain, just as sure as you stand there. I don't often go much on impressions. I'm not that kind of a detective; but this time I've got one that I'm going to stick to until it is proved false."

"And what is that impression, Jernigan?"

"That, when the truth is known about this thing, we will find that Nick Carter is as innocent as you and I are, captain."

CHAPTER III.

DAMNING EVIDENCE OF GUILT.

The first thing which Detectives Jernigan and Naughton did after they left the scene of the tragedy was to go at once, and together, to the home of Nick Carter—it was then after five o'clock in the morning—where, after ringing the bell for a long time, and after they had begun to look into each other's faces in surprise that there was no response to their summons, the door was at last opened, and Joseph, Nick Carter's valet, appeared, rubbing his eyes, and otherwise appearing rather confused.

"You must have been sleeping soundly, Joseph," said Jernigan.

"I think so, indeed, sir," was the reply. "I am usually up and about before this."

"We began to think that everybody in the house was dead."

"I don't wonder, sir. I can't imagine what made me sleep so."

"Well, never mind that now. Tell me what time your master left the house last night."

"He went out about noon yesterday, sir, saying that he would not return till very late, and that I was not to wait up for him."

"And you have not seen him since?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know whether he came home at all or not?"

"I do not, sir; but I can very quickly find out."

"Never mind. Where is Chick?"

"He is out of town, sir; but is due to return this morning. About ten, I think."

"And Ten-Ichi, and Patsy?"

"They went with Mr. Chick, sir."

"They were all to return at the same time, do you think?"

"I'm sure I don't know; but I suppose so."

"Do you happen to know where your master was going when he left home yesterday at noon?"

"No, sir. He did not tell me."

Jernigan turned to his companion.

"Dick," he said, "if you will go to headquarters, and report for both of us, I think I will remain right here until Chick arrives. It is more than likely that he will come earlier than ten o'clock. Anyhow, I'll take the chance."

Then he walked to the bottom of the steps with Naughton, and added, in a low tone:

"I feel as if I would like to take a little look around the house."

"I wouldn't do that, if I were you, Paul," said Naughton.

"Why not?"

"Because—you might find something which will add to the evidence against——"

"Look here, Dick, let me tell you one thing. If Nick Carter is guilty of this thing, I want to know it; if he is *not*, I want to know it ten times over; see?"

"Yes. I understand you now."

"And, if possible, I wish to be the first one to tell Chick about this affair."

"All right. I'll get along."

They parted, and Jernigan entered the house.

"Joseph," he said, "take me to your master's study. I will wait there for Chick; you understand."

"Yes, sir. But it's against orders."

"Never you mind the orders this time. You just do as I say. You know me. You know that I always go to that room with your master. I wish to go there now."

"If you will take the blame entirely upon yourself, sir."

"Certainly, I will do that."

So Joseph conducted Jernigan to the study, and was on the point of leaving him, when the detective called him to wait a moment.

"I wish to ask you a few questions, Joseph."

"Yes, sir."

"What time was it yesterday when Chick, with Ten-Ichi and Patsy, left the house?"

"About two, I think it was."

"Did your master know that they were going?"

"Yes. I heard them talking about it."

"Then that part of it seems straight enough. Now, did anybody call here yesterday after they had all gone away?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who?"

"I don't know the names of any of them, sir."

"Did you admit any of them to the house?"

"Only one."

"Who was that?"

"I did not ask his name."

"Why did you admit him to the house?"

"He asked permission to come inside and leave a message for Mr. Carter. I took him to the library, and remained there with him while he wrote and sealed his note. Then I conducted him to the door again."

"Where is that note?"

"There, sir, on the desk behind you. I brought it up here after he had gone; that and the rest of the mail."

"I see. You always do that, I suppose—bring such things to this room, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time was it when that man came here and wrote the note?"

"About four o'clock."

"Was he a gentleman?"

"I should say that he was, sir."

"Describe him."

"He was tall, and good-looking, with black eyes and a brown mustache. About thirty years old, I should think.

Well-dressed. Very white teeth. He wore a derby hat. That is about as well as I can remember him, sir."

"Has he ever been here before?"

"Twice, sir."

"Ah, indeed!"

"The day before yesterday, and the day before that, he was here, asking for Mr. Carter."

"Ah! He has never been here when your master was here, eh?"

"Not that I remember."

"Did he, on the occasion of any of those calls, tell you why he wished to see Mr. Carter?"

"No, sir. Please may I ask a question?"

"Yes."

"Has anything happened to Mr. Carter?"

"Yes, Joseph, something has happened him, and I am trying to get him out of it. He is in no immediate danger, although he is in grave trouble."

"Thank you, sir, for telling me that much."

"Now, who were those other people who called here yesterday, how many were there, and what did they want?"

"They were Mr. Bryan, and Mr. Cooney, and——"

"All regular clients of Mr. Carter's, eh?"

"All but one; yes, sir."

"Tell me about that one, then."

"It was a lady, sir."

"What sort of looking woman was she?"

"She wore a veil. I could not see her face. When she found that Mr. Carter was not at home, she seemed much annoyed, and then asked if I would take a verbal message for him, and deliver it the moment he returned. You know, I never tell people who call what time my master is expected home again, and when she asked me that question I told her I did not know, which was the literal truth, sir."

"Yes. Now, what was the message she left with you?"

"Word for word, it was this: 'Tell Mr. Carter, as soon as he returns, that he is not to keep his engagement for this evening. Tell him that Madam Olga Survanieff will not be at home to him.'"

"By thunder!" ejaculated Jernigan. "Go on, Joseph. Anything more?"

"Yes, sir. She was turning away, but I ventured to call to her."

"What did you say?"

"I asked her if she was Madam Survanieff in person."

"And she replied—what?"

"She replied: 'No; I am her maid. You say that it was Yvonne Blavatski who called to deliver the message. He will then understand that it is authoritative.'"

Jernigan was dumfounded.

"It looks blacker and blacker all the time," he told himself. Aloud he said:

"What more, Joseph?"

"Nothing more, sir. She went away then. I think she was angry at Mr. Carter about something."

"Humph! Well, you had best forget that part of it—and her call, too, for that matter, unless I ask you to remember them."

"Yes, sir."

"What time was she here?"

"I should say that it was about half an hour after the stranger left the letter, sir."

The central office detective tapped his foot impatiently on the rug for a moment, and then he said:

"Joseph, pick out from among that heap of letters the one that was left here by the stranger."

"Here it is, sir," said Joseph, after a pause.

"Now, watch me, Joseph."

Joseph did so, and he gave a gasp of dismay when he saw Jernigan deliberately tear the envelope open, and withdraw the letter.

"You should not do that, sir!" he exclaimed involuntarily; but a sharp glance from Jernigan subdued him at once.

The missive was brief, and very much to the point. It was without date, and read:

"MR. NICHOLAS CARTER: I have called here, on my own authority, to say to you that in an interview with Princess Olga Survanieff, this morning, she related to me the character of your conduct toward her recently. Because of your services to her in the past, she has bound me to secrecy concerning the matter, unless you persist. She even forbade my coming to you to-day. But I have taken the matter in my own hands to this extent: To say to you that, if you venture to intrude yourself upon her again, I shall see to it that your perfidious conduct toward her is known to the world—and that you suffer for it. She informed me, among other things, that you have notified her of your intention of calling there to-night. It is to be hoped that you will accept this as a warning, and remain away.

ALEXANDER BLAVATSKI,
"123 Jacqueline Street."

Jernigan stood like a statue for some time, with the letter gripped in his hand; but, at last, he roused himself sufficiently to ask calmly:

"Where is Jacqueline Street, Joseph?"

"I don't know exactly, sir. Somewhere in the Bronx, I think."

"Thank you. You may go now, and leave me here to think things over a bit."

"Yes, sir."

"And if Chick should come——"

"Here he is now, sir! Here he is now!"

And Chick, who had approached unheard, entered the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MISSING DAGGER.

"Hello, Jernigan!" exclaimed Chick, as he entered the room. "What are you doing here at this hour, eh? Bless me! It looks very much as if you were reading Nick's mail."

Jernigan waited until Joseph was well down the stairs, and then he replied quietly:

"I certainly have been reading one letter that was addressed to him. Sit down, Chick. I have a lot to tell you, and we will need every wit we've got to cope with this thing."

"With that thing? What the devil are you talking about?"

"You have heard nothing, then?"

"No. What are you talking about?"

"Nick has been arrested, and is now locked up in a cell—for murder."

Chick burst into a hearty laugh, which resounded through the house.

"I am very much afraid, Chick, that you will find it is no laughing matter," said Jernigan. "You know me well enough to know that I would not take it seriously unless it was extremely serious, don't you?"

Chick's face became grave at once. Then he said:

"Suppose he has killed somebody—it was surely in self-defense."

"Chick, if he did kill the woman he is charged with murdering, it was not in self-defense."

"But, great Heaven, Jernigan! you don't believe——"

"It isn't what I believe, Chick, or what you believe; it is what twelve men will or will not believe, if the case is ever brought to trial."

"Look here, Paul Jernigan, this isn't some confounded hoax, is it?"

"No; it is a most perplexing and a very serious reality."

Chick sank upon a chair. Then he started to his feet again.

"Where is Nick now?" he demanded.

"Probably, by this time, he is on his way to the Tombs."

"Then I will go to him at once."

"Wait, Chick. You will do nothing of the sort, if you will listen to me. You cannot do anything at all for him there, just now, and we may do something for him elsewhere. I was waiting for you; that is why I am here."

"Tell me about it, Jernigan. You are too good a man to go off half-cocked. Tell me all about it, please."

"I'll begin at the beginning, as I know it. It will save time."

"Thank you."

"Nick left home yesterday about noon, telling Joseph that he would not return till very late, and not to wait up for him."

"I know that already. I was here——"

"Do you know where he was going?"

"No; I don't. It was some private affair that he told me nothing about."

"Do you think he told anybody at all where he was going?"

"I don't know that he did. Why? It was a business matter of some kind, I think."

"That is one of the things we must find out—where he went yesterday. Now, I will go on with my story."

"Please."

"Some time after you had all left the house, a man called here, and asked for Nick. When Joseph said he was not at home, the man asked permission to enter and write a letter."

"And that is the letter you have been reading?"

"Yes. I will show it to you presently."

"All right."

"Not long after he had gone, a woman called. She wore a veil. She left a verbal message with Joseph, which, in effect, was that Nick was not to keep the engagement he expected to keep last night, and that Madame Olga Survanieff would not be at home to him if he called."

"Eh? What? What is that?"

"Wait. Joseph asked her who she was, and she replied that her name was Yvonne Blavatski."

"Sure. I know her. Know her well; but the other part of the message, about Olga's not being at home to——"

"Hold on, now, Chick. Don't go too fast."

"Well, what the——"

"Read this letter, left here by the stranger."

Chick took the letter, and read it through to the end without a word; but then——

"Well, of all the——" he began; and stopped.

"Was it Olga Survanieff who was killed?" he asked.

"No; it was the other one—the maid, Yvonne Blavatski."

Chick could only stare at Jernigan in open-mouthed amazement; and Jernigan added:

"It is Olga Survanieff who makes the charge of murder against Nick Carter."

Chick bounded from his chair.

"I'll never believe it in a thousand years!" he cried out.

"I heard her make the charge," said Jernigan calmly. "Before this time she has made it officially."

"But, man alive, the thing is impossible!"

"It is, nevertheless, true."

"Then it was not Olga Survanieff who made it."

"There seems to be no doubt that it *is* Olga Survanieff. But wait. I haven't finished my story."

"Go ahead; but it's all infernal rot, you know."

"Then, Chick, it is up to us to find the rot and eradicate it; and, to do that, you must be patient."

"Confound it, yes! Go on."

"At half-past three o'clock this morning, I, among several others, broke into the house in which Olga Survanieff lives. We found her at the top of the first flight of stairs, in a swoon. She recovered within a moment or two after our arrival. She directed us to the rear room on that floor——"

"The library. I know."

"I wouldn't appear to know too blooming much about things, if I were you, Chick."

"Well, what did you find in the library?"

"We found the dead body of Yvonne Blavatski, with the insensible person of Nick Carter lying almost across it. Nick's——"

"What!"

"Nick's left hand was clutching the woman's throat. His right hand was clasped around the hilt of a dagger that was buried in her bosom, and——"

"My God! man, what *are* you talking about?"

"Wait. And that dagger I happened to recognize as one that belonged to him; one that was presented to him by the district attorney's office. It was the same gold-lettered dagger that killed Alexis de Plantois, in that other case, and has the name of 'Olga Survanieff, Moscow,' wrought in gold letters in the hilt."

"But that dagger is here, man! Here in the house! In that safe, over there in the corner."

"Wait again. That is one of the things I came here to ascertain. But we will come to that presently."

Chick sank back again upon the chair.

"As I have said," continued Jernigan, "Nick was unconscious. He was only half dressed—or, to put it more correctly, half undressed. He had been hit on the head with a pair of heavy brass tongs that were lying on the floor beside him, and around and about him was the most awful smell of whisky that I have ever known—unless it was a regular Bowery bummer."

"Go ahead, Paul. Let's hear the rest of it."

"We tried to rouse him, but could not. Then Olga Survanieff told her story."

Chick groaned.

"I cannot believe it was Olga," he said.

"Her story was that her maid, who was also a relative and friend, had gone out to spend the evening; that she herself had retired quite late; that about three o'clock Nick Carter had forced his way into the house—and you and I both know, Chick, how easily Nick can enter any house, if he cares to do so."

"Go on, confound you!"

"That he had forced his way into the house, and had tried to break into her room, where she was sleeping; that in the midst of this scene her maid returned, and undertook to defend her; that Nick, maddened by the presence of the maid, attacked her by first attempting to frighten her away by firing his revolver, and finally by seizing her by the throat, forcing her backward, and stabbing her with the dagger he took from his belt—*and the belt was there,* strapped around his body."

"Go on."

"The mistress then dashed to the assistance of her maid, seized the tongs, and struck our friend on the head, just as he delivered the blow with the dagger."

"Go on—go on—go on! Do you suppose that I can wait forever for your tale?"

"Patience, lad."

"Well?"

"She saw them both fall. She ran through the house, opened a window, and screamed for help. Then she started for the street, but fainted at the top of the stairs, where we found her."

"But what took you there?"

"Neighbors, who heard the shots and screams, telephoned."

"Is that all?"

"Not half, Chick."

"Please get along with it, Paul."

"The woman says that Nick was crazy drunk when he entered the house; that his conduct of late has been extremely offensive to her. She swears that she *saw* him stab the maid."

"Well?"

"When we found him, he was half undressed, as I have said. He wore only his shirt, trousers, and stockings. His collar, tie, pin, and cuffs were on one of the small stands. His coat and vest were on the couch. His shoes were beside it. There was a flask, full of whisky, save for about one drink, in his coat——"

"But, confound it, Nick doesn't drink!"

"I know that as well as you do. I am telling you what we found."

"Go on."

"The table that stood in the center of the room had been overturned, and the drop-light shattered to pieces. Among the débris on the floor was a letter, torn into four pieces, which the woman says was brought to her by a messenger shortly before midnight. She says she read it through, told the boy to inform the gentleman that she had gone out of town, then tore the letter in the shape we found it, and threw it on the table in the library."

"Well, what of the letter?"

"This: If that letter and the address on the envelope is not in Nick Carter's handwriting, it is the best bit of forgery I ever saw."

"Humph! What does the letter say?"

"This: 'Dearest Olga, I want you to forgive me. I must see you to-night, before the night is over. I was

coming earlier, but I can't get there before two, or after. Wait up for me. Send word by the boy who brings this. Nick.' That is what it said, word for word."

"You say it was *apparently* in Nick's handwriting?"

"Yes—apparently. If not his writing, then a perfect copy of it."

Chick smiled, for the first time.

"I think that is our first point in the case, then," he said quite calmly; "for, if Nick was as drunk as they would have us believe, he could not have written very perfectly; eh?"

"Oh, I don't know about that. But let us drop that for a moment, while you look in the safe for the dagger. I only hope that you will find it there."

Chick turned his attention to the small safe. He worked the combination, opened the door, and then the compartment inside which had contained the dagger.

It was not there! The compartment was empty!

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST SUGGESTIVE CLUES.

"When did you last see that dagger, Chick?" asked Jernigan, as the two looked at each other with frightened eyes.

"I don't think I have seen it since I put it there myself."

"Ah, so you placed it there yourself, eh?"

"Yes. At Nick's direction. He was in the room when I did so."

"When was that?"

"Soon after it was given to him; about a month, possibly five weeks ago."

"And you have not seen it since?"

"No."

"Nor talked about it?"

"No."

"He has never mentioned it to you?"

"Never."

"Who knows the combination of that safe besides yourself and Nick?"

"Nobody."

"Not even Patsy, or Ten-Ichi?"

"No."

"Then Nick must have taken it from the safe, for some reason, himself."

"That is the only explanation of its absence."

Jernigan sighed deeply; then he walked to the window, and stood for a long time, looking out upon the bright, sunny morning. After awhile he turned again to Chick.

"I cannot believe it possible that Nick Carter——"

He got no further, for Chick had leaped upon him, and seized him by both shoulders.

"Paul," he said tensely, "good as you are, good as you have been to me, if you breathe one word of belief in the guilt of Nick Carter, by Heaven, I'll kill you!"

And Jernigan put out his own arms, and rested them on Chick's, so that the two stood in the position that wrestling boys call the "square hold," and he smiled into Chick's eyes, as he replied:

"You did not let me finish my sentence."

"Finish it now, then."

"I cannot believe it possible that Nick Carter has walked deliberately into a trap like this one. That is what I was going to say. The evidence is too good; it is too strong against him. There is too much regularity about it; too much finesse. The thing is, somehow, overdone—but, by Jove, it is carefully done!"

"You are right there."

"Where is Patsy? Where is Ten-Ichi?"

"They're in Albany. We can't wait for them. We've got to work fast, Paul."

"Right you are."

"I suppose they will be holding the inquest right away, won't they?"

"Yes; unless you ask for a delay."

"What's the use of delay? If we can't clear this thing up inside of twenty-four hours, we never can."

"That is exactly what I think about it."

"What did the coroner say about it?"

"At two this afternoon."

"Where?"

"At his office."

"I must go and see Nick first."

"I wouldn't, if I were you, Chick. Let me do that for you. You go and see that woman."

"That's so, by Jove! Then, there's another thing."

"What?"

"That Alexander Blavatski. I——"

"I think, Chick, you had best leave your interview with him until after the inquest. If you should go where he is just now, fresh from reading that letter, I am afraid that you would find yourself in almost as bad a predicament as Nick."

"I reckon you're right about that. By the way, there is another thing. Didn't you say something about a belt in connection with that dagger?"

"Yes; a belt and a sheath."

"There were neither with the dagger. It was naked."

"Nick had a belt with a sheath strapped around his body. Did he have such an article, or articles, in his possession?"

"Yes; several."

"Would you know if any were missing from his collection?"

"Sure. We will look. Come into the next room."

The "next room" was Nick's costuming-room, and in another moment Chick was hauling over the contents of a chest where such things were kept.

One by one, he threw the belts out upon the floor, and he continued his search to the bottom of the chest; and then he looked up, with something nearly akin to misery in his eyes.

"There is a belt and a sheath missing," he said.

Jernigan did not reply, and they went out of the room together, and in silence.

Neither referred to the subject again as they descended the stairs; and there, just as they were about to leave the house, Jernigan bethought himself of another thing.

"Chick," he said, "when I came here this morning, it was after Joseph's usual time for rising, and I remember now that he looked rather done up, and said that he didn't know how he could have slept so late. Could there be anything in that?"

"There might. I'll ask him;" and he called Joseph with them into the library.

"Joseph," said Chick, "I want you to answer me very carefully now."

"Yes, sir."

"What time did you go to bed last night?"

"Half-past ten, sir."

"What time did the other servants go to bed?"

"The cook went about ten; the housekeeper about ten or fifteen minutes later."

"That is about their usual time for retiring, but it was rather early for you, Joseph, wasn't it?"

"I was uncommonly sleepy, sir, and Mr. Carter told me not to——"

"Yes; I know that. What made you sleepy?"

"I ate an uncommon hearty dinner, sir. That might have had something to do with it."

"Did the other servants complain of being sleepy, too?"

"Yes, sir; they did, now that you speak about it. The cook fell asleep twice in her chair, and the housekeeper nearly yawned the top of her head off twice."

"Now, what do you suppose made you all so sleepy?"

"I haven't an idea, sir."

"Where were Peter and Pansy?"

"They haven't slept in the house for a week, sir. I suppose you had not heard about it, because you've been away most of the time."

"Did you hear any noises in the night?"

"Not a sound—that is, until Mr. Jernigan rang the bell this morning; and he had an uncommon hard time waking me."

"What did you have for your dinner? You and the other servants were here alone, weren't you?"

"Yes. We had just as usual, sir."

"No extras of any kind?"

"No, sir."

"No booze? No beer? Nothing of that kind?"

"Not a thing."

"What did you drink with your dinner?"

"Coffee."

"That should have kept you awake, instead of putting you to sleep."

"That is what I think. But this was some of that special coffee——"

"What special coffee? What do you mean by that?"

"It came from Charles' grocery, sir, yesterday afternoon. A five-pound package, sir. Mr. Carter sent it after he went out. The boy said that it was a special brand that they had just imported, and——"

"And you thought you would try some of it for dinner? Very good. Very good."

"It happened to be all the coffee there was in the house, sir. The housekeeper forgot to order some in the morning."

"All the same, you go down-stairs and get what is left of that package. Then take it around the corner to Doctor Bracket, and tell him that he will do Mr. Carter a very great favor if he will have it thoroughly analyzed before night. That will do for the present."

Chick turned then to Jernigan.

"There may be something in that," he said, "although it is not at all certain."

"All the same, I think you will find there is something in it."

"We part here at the door," said Chick.

"Yes."

"You will go straight to Nick?"

"As soon as I have reported at headquarters."

"Da—confound headquarters! Go straight to Nick."

"I'll have to find out first where he is."

"You can do that with the telephone inside the house."

"Leave it to me, old man; leave it to me."

"All right."

But Nick Carter was not in a cell, as it happened; he was in the prison ward at Bellevue Hospital, where he had been taken after the doctors had pronounced his case to be critical.

Nevertheless, Jernigan was true to his word, and he went to him, and saw him.

But the detective did not know him. He was still in that same stupor from which he had not roused since he was discovered beside his supposed victim.

"What do you think is the matter with him?" asked Jernigan of the young physician in attendance; and the reply, given rather brutally, was:

"Booze. A great quantity of whisky taken into a system that was unaccustomed to it. He must have had two quarts of whisky in him when we pumped him out. The only wonder is that it didn't kill him, unless there is a greater one in the fact that his stomach retained it."

"I see. I see. That is interesting. You found no signs of a drug of any kind with the liquor, did you?"

"No."

"Anything at all, eh?"

"Besides the booze, you mean?"

"Yes."

"There was some glycerine, I believe. I suppose he took that to keep the liquor down, or to sweeten it; or to make him drunk less rapidly. It would do any of the three."

"I would like to ask you one question, doctor, since you seem well posted on these subjects."

"Well, sir, what is it?"

"You say that you pumped the whisky out of him, eh?"

"Yes."

"Now, tell me this: Would there be any way of pumping it *into* him?"

"Eh? I don't quite understand."

"Suppose a man were unconscious, could you pump a lot of liquor into his stomach while he was in that state, and could the stomach be made to retain it?"

"Well, that's a new one on me. I should say not; but I'll look it up."

"I wish you would; and let me know. I'll call in two hours for the information."

CHAPTER VI.

CHICK'S FIGHT AGAINST TIME.

It would be utterly impossible to give any adequate idea of the state of repressed excitement which Chick felt that morning.

Of course, he knew it to be utterly impossible that his beloved chief should have committed the crime charged to him, or any other one, for that matter; and yet the collection of evidence against him was almost overwhelming.

While Jernigan, and Naughton, and others among Nick Carter's friends believed it to be the result of a clever plot against him, Chick *knew* it.

There is a great deal in the sense of possession, if one stops to analyze it.

What mystified him most of all among the things he had heard that morning was that part of the story which related to Olga Survanieff.

He recalled how entirely grateful Olga had been to Nick—and to himself, as well—for saving her from the machinations of her enemies in that other case in which she had really been the pivotal character; that case of the "Gold-Lettered Dagger;" he recalled how often she had taken occasion to express that gratitude in more ways than one; and, to save his life, he could not understand how she could have been prevailed upon to turn against him.

Here, also, to the world at large was another, and really a more convincing, proof of Nick's perfidy.

The world would say that she would *not* have turned against him were not the things insinuated against him true.

Plainly, in Chick's mind, Olga was the key to the whole situation.

He lost no time, therefore, in making his way as rapidly as possible to the house of the murder; but only to discover when he arrived there that it was deserted, save by a solitary officer in charge—and that particular officer had no idea where the princess could be found.

He asked where the body of the murdered woman had been taken, and was made just as wise as before. Then he hurried to the police station.

What he discovered there was interesting, as disclosing how rapidly the wheels of justice, so often clogged, can sometimes move.

The charge had been duly made against Nick by Olga Survanieff, and the detective was held, without bail, to await the action of the grand jury. The body of the murdered woman had been given over to relatives who claimed it—that Alexander Blavatski and his wife, who gave their address as 123 Jacqueline Street, and thither, also, Olga Survanieff had gone.

Chick pondered for a long time then, considering whether he should journey out to the far end of the Bronx, to a house where, in all probability, he would be refused admittance, or if it would not be best for him to await the time of the inquest.

It was yet early in the day—not yet nine o'clock. It had been only a few minutes past six when his interview with Jernigan began, for he had arrived back in New York much earlier than had been his original intention; and he thanked God for it.

"Ten minutes to nine," he mused, half aloud. "I have just five hours and ten minutes in which to establish a case." He felt that he *must* establish his case in that time. He could not bear to think that even the breath of suspicion should linger against his chief.

"I must leave the woman who accuses him until then," he continued, following the same train of thought. "Now, let me think a moment, and decide what I must be prepared to controvert in order to establish the presumption that the whole thing is a conspiracy against Nick.

"First, of course, there is the identity of Olga. That must wait until two o'clock.

"Second, the letter supposed to be in Nick's handwriting, found in the room where the crime was committed. That, also, will have to await the inquest.

"Third, the messages sent to the house, warning Nick, not to call. All that depends upon the identity of Olga.

"Fourth, the mystery about that dagger and the belt. Nick is the only one who can give me any clue to that, for I do not believe that these villains could enter the house, even if the coffee was drugged, as I suspect, and take away the dagger and the belt; the dagger from a

safe of which they did not know the combination, and the belt from a chest which they knew nothing about.

"Fifth, the mystery about Nick's condition—and that seems to me to be the greatest mystery of all."

He had discovered, among other information, that Nick had been taken to the hospital, and so now he sprang into the automobile—for he had made the journey up-town in Nick's Peerless—and started away as fast as the law would permit toward Bellevue.

It will be remembered that Jernigan had been obliged to go to headquarters before he went to the hospital, and the consequence was that Chick arrived at the door of the establishment just as Jernigan was in the act of leaving.

Chick called to him quickly.

"What did you find out?" he asked.

Jernigan told him in a few words all that had taken place between him and the young doctor, and ended by saying that he had agreed to return in two hours for the desired information.

"Two hours!" exclaimed Chick. "Two nothings! That was a happy thought, all the same, and it is the explanation of the whole thing, too. Say, Paul!"

"Yes."

"Skip around to the Post Graduate College; it isn't far from here."

"I know."

"Ask for the dean; you'll find him there by this time. Tell him the case from top to bottom, just as it is. Tell him we must have this thing ready by two o'clock. Ask him to call several of the best authorities he can lay his hands on, and to consult about the matter, and that we want them to be at the inquest, prepared to give expert testimony, no matter what it costs."

"You are taking for granted what their opinions will be."

"Great Heaven, man! I *know* what it will be! You don't think that Nick Carter drank that stuff, do you?"

"No."

"Then go ahead, like a good fellow. Wait for me at the door, if you are through with the doctors before I get there. After that we will go to Doctor Bracket, and find out about that coffee."

Chick hurried into the hospital then, and the badge he wore took him straight to the bedside of his chief.

Nick's condition had changed somewhat during the few moments that had elapsed since Jernigan's visit, and he began to show some signs of approaching consciousness.

They were very faint, to be sure, and the nurses were still working over him, while several of the doctors were gathered near, watching the "history" of the case. It is a regrettable fact that doctors frequently think more about the "history" of a case than they do of the case itself.

As Chick approached, he brushed them aside, with an assumption of authority which startled them, for they had no idea who he was.

Bending over his chief, he drew back the eyelids, and looked at them searchingly.

Then, turning to the doctors and nurses, he said bruskly:

"Please do not be alarmed at what I am about to do. I shall not injure your patient; far from it. But I can show you a trick about restoring vitality to an ordinarily healthy body that will surprise you."

Without ceremony, he threw back the sheet and blanket that covered the detective, and then, with a sudden motion, he lifted Nick clear from the cot. Then, dropping upon one knee, he placed Nick across it, face down, caught the forehead with his right hand, and worked the head up and down twice; turned the detective over on his back, and duplicated these acts; and then, leaping suddenly to his feet again, he tossed Nick into the air as if he had been a child, brought him down on his knees upon the cot, and then, with a sudden jerk that looked as if he would wrench the detective's head from his shoulders, he turned him over on his back again.

The doctors and nurses believed him to be a madman, and were rushing forward to seize him, when it was all over, for Chick had worked so rapidly, and they had been so amazed, that he had concluded his ju-jutsu operation before they realized that it was begun.

He turned and faced them, when they would have seized upon him.

"Wait," he said. "Look at your patient before you attack me."

They looked; and they were, indeed, amazed.

The detective's eyes were wide open. The light of consciousness shone in them. Perspiration had started out all over his body. Vitality had been fully restored. Only intense weakness remained.

The doctors were crowding around their patient, but Chick waved them back a second time.

"You must wait a moment longer," he said.

Then he dropped upon his knees beside Nick, and, placing his lips close to the detective's ear, he whispered:

"Listen, Nick. Don't try to speak. I can remain with you only a few moments. It will be as well if you pretend that you are only half conscious after I have gone. You are in serious trouble. Conspiracy against you. Take hold of my wrist—so. Press once for yes, and twice for no. Don't try to talk yet. Do you understand?"

One pressure.

"Did you take that gold-lettered dagger out of the safe yourself?"

One pressure.

"And the belt and sheath from the chest?"

One pressure.

"Have you been to Olga's house lately, save only this time?"

Two pressures.

"Has there been any sort of misunderstanding between you, from any cause?"

Two pressures.

"Do you think you will be able to talk with me understandingly by one o'clock? That will be almost four hours hence."

One pressure.

"I will be here at that time, with proper authority to converse with you. These doctors are on the point of firing me now, and I don't want a row with them. Good-by for the present. I'll be back here at one."

Chick stood upon his feet just as a doctor in authority put one hand on his shoulder to command him to rise.

"It seems to me, young man," he began; but Chick stopped him.

"Pardon me, doctor," he said, "if I have transgressed your rules. This gentleman is a very dear friend of mine. I have merely assisted your people here in restoring vitality to his body by a method which we both understand and have practised many times. They will tell you that it is wonderful. Some time I will explain it to you. I hope that, notwithstanding the fact that he is for the moment a prisoner, you will give him excellent care. Good day, gentlemen."

Chick talked so rapidly that the doctor did not have an opportunity to say a word, and he was gone before the physician could reply; and Chick had spoken loud enough to apprise Nick of the fact that he *was* a prisoner, which he had neglected to do before.

Outside the institution, he leaped into his motor-car, and dashed around the corner.

Three minutes later he drew up in front of the Post Graduate College, in Twenty-third Street.

And, just as he did so, Paul Jernigan descended the steps to meet him.

"Pile in, Paul!" called Chick. "You can tell me about it as we go, for I already know that you were successful."

"Where to now?" asked Jernigan.

"I'm bound for the Bronx now. I'm going to try to have a look at that woman; anyhow, at the corpse; and you, with your central-office authority, can help me to do both."

"The latter, perhaps," replied Jernigan, "but I doubt the former."

CHAPTER VII.

THE REFINEMENT OF REVENGE.

"I'll ask you a few questions presently, after we have stopped at Doctor Bracket's for a minute, and then at the house for five. We haven't time now," said Chick, as soon as they were again speeding through the streets. "Lord! I never was so exhilarated in my life as I am at this moment! Exhilarated with speed, I mean. Here we are!"

Chick applied the brakes, leaped to the pavement almost before the machine had come to a stop, ran up the steps, and nearly pushed the electric button through the casing of the door in his eagerness.

But the doctor had seen the machine approaching, and came to the door in person.

"Hello, Doc!" said Chick. "What was in the coffee?"

"Orsere."

"What's that? Never heard of it."

"I'll tell you about it at the inquest, for I see that you are in a hurry now."

"No; at a quarter to one. I'll come here after you. Take you with me to see Nick. It's important. Who told you about the murder?"

"Joseph. A policeman on the street told him about it."

"Oh. Quarter to one. Remember."

"I'll be ready."

Chick dashed away again, and into the automobile.

From the doctor's house to Nick's it was only a turn around the corner, and when they arrived Chick shouted the one word, "Wait!" into Jernigan's ear, and ran into the house.

"Good news, as far as it goes, Joseph," he called out to the faithful valet, who opened the door for him. "Can't stop to tell you about it now. Follow me up-stairs, while I get into a disguise."

And then, in the costume-room, while he was rapidly arranging his personal appearance so that the people who lived in Jacqueline Street could not know who he was, he added:

"That coffee was drugged, Joseph, with some confounded thing that sounds like horsehair, only, of course, that isn't the name of it."

"No, sir; certainly not."

"Do you happen to know where the office of Coroner Bluewater is located, Joseph?"

"Yes, sir. Perfectly well."

"Be there at two o'clock, Joseph, and have the other servants with you."

"Peter and Pansy, also?"

"No; don't want them. They were out."

"Is the case very bad against the master, sir?"

"Rather bad; but we'll beat them before two o'clock."

"Praise the Lord, Mr. Chick!"

"I do, Joseph, with all my heart."

"Is there anything that I can do?"

"Nothing just now. If there is, I will let you know."

Chick was working rapidly while he talked; and, as he had already decided upon what he would wear, he was not long in adopting the disguise he had chosen.

When he ran from the house and got into the motor-

car again, Jernigan announced that he had been gone exactly eight minutes; and then they speeded away toward the Bronx, exceeding the speed limit and driving the machine for all it was worth wherever the roadway was clear ahead of them; often chased, and frequently, when they were compelled to slow up, overtaken by bicycle policemen, upon whom, however, Jernigan's badge of authority acted like magic.

The costume which Chick wore represented him to be a professional gentleman of middle age—nothing more.

"Paul," he said, as soon as they were well started, "I want you to represent me to be the regular police department doctor; will you?"

"Sure. What then?"

"Anything you please; only make an excuse for taking me there to see the body of the murdered woman, and play the game, if it is possible to do so, so that I can get a look at the woman who calls herself Olga Survanieff."

"I'll try. I'll do my best."

"That settles that. Now, what did the doctors say about pumping liquor *into* a stomach at a time when the patient is unconscious? Eh?"

"Dead easy."

"So?"

"By an expert. Some sort of a long tube would have to be used, and an expert would have to handle it. They will explain it all on the stand. There are three or four of them coming. The whole bunch were interested in the case when I told them what we were trying to prove."

"Were, eh? Well, they will be more interested than ever when they hear what we *will* demonstrate. Tell me something about what they said. I want to be posted."

"I can't use their lingo, Chick."

"Cut it, then, and give me only the idea."

"Well, a little glycerin, or sweet oil, would be mixed with the liquor; also, a very small quantity of some kind of sodium; at the same time the patient is made to inhale a small quantity of chloroform, which acts as a stay on the vital functions of the body—— Oh, say! I'm no pill-broker! You wait till you get there."

"That's all right. I know enough about it from what you have told me."

"Now, suppose you tell me something about Nick."

"I brought him round."

"You did? Good!"

"He couldn't talk. Not a word; but he could press my wrist just a little with his fingers. The operation by which I brought him out of his condition is almost as heroic as the one that got him into it. He could not have whispered, even, if I had asked him to do so."

"Well?"

"I know that he took the dagger out of the safe himself. Also, that he did the same for the belt and sheath; that he has had no quarrel or misunderstanding with Olga Survanieff."

"Well, that's something, anyhow."

"Bless your heart, I knew all that before! The thing was to get him in conditions so that he will be able to explain things to me before that inquest."

"Sure."

"You see, Paul, the conspirators have banked upon it that he would not be able to do that. I am rapidly arriving at the decision that there is a doctor among that crowd, and a mighty clever one, at that."

"There seems to be no doubt of that now."

"Not a bit of it."

"There is one thing that gets me, though, Chick."

"What is that?"

"If Nick took the dagger and things out of the house himself——"

"I didn't say that he took them out of the house, but probably he did. However, go on."

"Well, supposing he did so, what was the use in drugging the coffee for the servants to swallow?"

"That's dead easy, Paul. They didn't want 'em to *hear* anything during the night, and they didn't want them to know that they had been drugged. They overdid it just a little. Joseph slept an hour too long."

"But what was it for?"

"So they could wait outside, and watch for Nick's return to the house, whereupon—of course, I am guessing at this—whereupon, one of them ran up the steps, and rang the bell like everything soon after he entered. Don't you see?"

"And then enticed him away on some pretext? Is that what you mean?"

"Sure. Not only enticed him away, but actually enticed him to that very house."

"That sounds reasonable."

"There isn't a doubt in my mind that they told him that Olga was in trouble, or had been murdered, or something like that. You know what he would do in such a case. He would grab his hat, and say, 'Come on, boys!'"

"And that is how they got him inside the house."

"That is my idea of it. I would not be surprised if it turned out that the girl was already dead when Nick got there, and that one of them hit him a clip with those tongs while he was looking at her. He would be so absorbed at such a moment that he wouldn't pay any attention to what was going on around him at all. After that the rest was easy."

"There is one objection to your theory, however, Chick."

"What is it?"

"If the girl was already dead, and the dagger was sticking into her, he would have recognized it."

"Not at first glance; and they probably didn't give him a chance for two."

"Why not at once?"

"Because he knows there are several like it in existence, the only difference being in the names spelled by the gold letters in the guard at the hilts."

"I see. I remember that, also, now that you speak of it."

"If that is the correct idea, the rest was easy. They only had to pump him full of that mixture you so graphically described to me——"

"Aw, say!"

"Remove a part of his clothing, and arrange the rest of the stage-setting as you saw it. Then, after the others had made good their escape from the house, the woman fired off the pistol a couple of times, ran to the window, and screamed, and then waited for the officers to arrive."

"But, great Jehosephat, Chick! Think of the nerve of that woman!"

"That is precisely what I am chiefly concerned in thinking about at the present moment."

"Eh?"

"I simply *know* that Olga Survanieff, even if she were willing, which is equally impossible, would never have the nerve to do such a thing."

"But that is the house where she lived."

"Yes."

"And the dead woman was her maid."

"Yes."

"Then where was *she*, if the woman who makes the complaint is not she?"

"That is what we are at the present moment trying to find out."

"Probably they killed her, too."

"It is more than likely."

"And carted the body away, so the other woman could play her part?"

"Well, Paul, that is the way I look at it. Of course, it seems impossible. There may be another woman, a relative, or something like that, who looks enough like her to pass off for her among people who do not know her well."

"But they would know that they could not fool *you*—and *Nick!*"

"They wouldn't give a hang about that part of it."

"Why not? Eh?"

"Because it would be to our interest to make the claim that the woman making the complaint is *not* Olga Survanieff. The very nature of Nick's profession would make his claim of such a thing appear like one of his tricks—one of the tricks of his trade, so to speak."

"It's an infernally clever idea, Chick."

"You hit just the word that time, old man. That's just what it is—infernally clever—just a little bit too infernally clever, I think."

"But why should they take the trouble to do all this?"

"The refinement of revenge, Paul, gotten up by the friends of your namesake, Paul Survanieff, Olga's half-brother, who tried to murder her, from whom we saved her, and who is now awaiting execution in Sing Sing. The refinement of revenge. They destroy Nick Carter's reputation first; they isolate him from all his friends; they make of him an execrated man; they ruin him mentally and physically; they put him in the death-house, to await his doom, and finally the great State of New York murders him for them—if they succeed. Is not that the refinement of revenge?"

CHAPTER VIII.

WRITTEN IN BLOOD.

There was crape hanging against the door of No. 123 Jacqueline Street, and the detectives in the motor-car, therefore, had little difficulty in finding the house.

It was a pleasant, comfortable-looking little home, too.

A square, frame house, surrounded on four sides by the open air, it stood back from the street a distance of twenty feet, and was about equidistant from its neighbors on either side; and there was no fence, just a lawn in front and at the sides.

Chick and Jernigan had changed places some distance back, so that when they arrived, if any person happened to observe their approach, it appeared that Jernigan was doing the motoring, and not the middle-aged and rather pompous individual who sat beside him.

They passed slowly into the yard, Jernigan in advance, but, before they could reach the door of the house, it opened, and the very man whom Joseph had so well described to Jernigan stepped outside upon the low porch, and closed it after him.

Also, before either of them had a chance to speak, he did so.

"I regret, gentlemen, that we are not receiving callers to-day," he said. And his voice was smooth and even, entirely courteous. There was a smile on his face, too, which showed his gleaming teeth.

"Our errand here is official, sir," replied Jernigan. "We are not intruders upon your sorrows."

He threw back his coat, and revealed his central-office badge, and added:

"We have come under orders of the police department."

"Ah! And may I ask why you are sent here?"

"This gentleman with me is the police department physician. It was thought wise that he should view the body of the unfortunate woman inside before the inquest this afternoon."

"In that case—of course. Step inside. You will pardon my apparent rudeness, but we have been so bothered by——"

"I have no doubt of it, sir. Not one in the world," replied Jernigan, before he could complete the sentence.

And so the way inside the house was made easy for them.

Alexander Blavatski, the man described by Joseph as the writer of the letter, held the door open for them until they had passed inside the hall, and then carefully closed and locked it again. That done, he turned to the parlor, and performed precisely the same service there, with the one exception that he did not lock the door.

It was evident that there had been speedy work, so far as the undertakers were concerned, for already the body had been properly "laid out," and—if death can ever be called beautiful—was really beautiful in its perfect repose.

Yvonne Blavatski had been, in life, almost as beautiful as her mistress.

Chick recognized her instantly, and he realized that so much of the representations of the conspirators was at least true. It was Yvonne Blavatski who was the victim of that terrible crime. Of that much there could be no doubt whatever.

In the meantime, while he was occupied with the pretended, if rather cursory, examination of the dead young woman, Jernigan was doing his best to carry out the other part of the program; and he was accomplishing this by means of a somewhat one-sided conversation with the handsome Alexander Blavatski.

"I don't suppose you are aware of the fact, since you have never seen me," he said, "but I happened to be one of the officers who responded to the alarm when this awful crime was committed."

"Indeed?" was the polite, if noncommittal, reply.

"Yes. Madam, the princess, was terribly wrought up, but I must say that I have never known a woman to act more bravely under such circumstances." He did not emphasize the word "act," although he felt very much like doing so.

"I am sure, sir, that she will appreciate your opinion of her fortitude," was the cold response.

"May I ask how she is bearing the strain, now that the first shock of it is over?"

"I might say with about the same degree of fortitude."

"She will, of course, be present at the inquest?"

"Most certainly."

"Will you be so good as to tell her that I would like to ask her a few questions——"

"That would be utterly impossible, sir."

"But it is in the line of my duty——"

"Duty or not, it is impossible. I received the assurance of the coroner that she should not be molested. She will tell again all she knows about the affair at the inquest."

"My chief suggested a few questions to me, which he thought it would be well to ask her before that ordeal begins, and also some few suggestions to make to her regarding——"

"You must excuse me for interrupting you, but you cannot see her."

Blavatski smiled rather sardonically at Jernigan as he said this, and the latter was on the point of replying sharply, when he caught a gesture from Chick, which told him not to press the subject.

"Very well. You will do me the favor, in that case, to convey to her an expression of my extreme solicitude," he said, instead, bowing like a courtier as he said it; and Blavatski returned the bow, without replying.

There was nothing left for them to do then but to take their leave; and, besides, time was pressing, and time was the one element in this affair which Chick was least disposed to waste.

He now accosted the man of the house.

"I am extremely obliged to you for your courtesy, Mr. —er——" he said, and stopped.

"My name is Blavatski, doctor."

"Ah! This young woman was your——"

"My kinswoman; nothing more. A distant relative."

"Thank you. I grieve with you, sir, in your loss. You will, of course, understand that my presence here is a mere formality. I hope the young woman who witnessed the deed is recovering from the shock?" He said this as if he had not heeded the other conversation on that point; but Blavatski only bowed. He made no reply.

And so he bowed them out of the house, until they all stood together upon the porch again.

"A delightful spot for a home," said Chick, then. "Officer, have you a match?"

Chick had taken a cigar from one of his pockets, and, as he asked for the match, he turned so that his back was toward the street; then, as he received the match and set it aflame, he took a step backward, while he applied the lighted match to his cigar.

In doing so, he stepped too far—that is, he appeared to do so; and did it so well that even Jernigan was deceived.

His heel went over the edge of the step; he stumbled, tried to catch himself, and then, by stretching out his left hand, he managed to seize upon the corner post of the porch.

In doing so, his weight swung him around, his hat was knocked from his head, and went bowling across the lawn, while his cigar went in another direction. But the cigar had been directed by his hand, whereas the hat was permitted to fall where it would.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, righting himself instantly. "That was a narrow escape; *but*—no damage is done. How extremely clumsy of me, to be sure!"

Jernigan had already darted after the hat, but Chick

did not give him time to pick up the cigar; he wished to do that for himself.

He turned quickly, the instant he had fully recovered his equilibrium, and then stepped out upon the lawn, where, having recovered the cigar and placed it again between his teeth, he paused to adjust his collar and straighten his clothing.

But, in the meantime, his eyes were busy, although he occupied but a seeming instant in the operation; then he returned to the porch, although he did not step upon it again.

"Thank you," he said to Jernigan, as the latter restored his hat. "That came quite near to being a bad fall. Have you another match?"

Jernigan, who thought he saw a meaning in all this, now replied that he had not another one; but Blavatski had already produced a box of them from one of his pockets, and now came to the rescue.

And so the cigar was at last lighted, they said their adieus, and in another moment were speeding again toward the city.

They rode together in silence for some time, and at last Jernigan asked:

"Say, Chick, was that fall of yours real, or was it a fake?"

"Did it look real?"

"To the life."

"Do you think I fooled that cutthroat?"

"I'm positive of it."

"Do you think we fooled him all through the game?"

"I'm positive of that, too; only he might telephone to head——"

Chick put on the brake so suddenly that Jernigan was thrown forward in his seat.

"What in thunder is the matter now?" he growled.

"See that drug-store, there on the corner?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, you telephone first, that is all! See? I wouldn't have him get onto us now for a million in cash! Hurry!"

While Jernigan was inside the store telephoning to headquarters his wish that if a question should be asked concerning their authority to call at the house, as they had done, the reply might be that they were sent there, with full authority, Chick quietly produced a tightly wadded roll of paper from his coat pocket.

It was about as large again as an ordinary marble, and was still moist on the outside, as if some person had crushed it together between the teeth, to give it greater compactness.

He unrolled it—opened it; and then he gave a great start; and then, with a satisfied smile on his face, he quietly folded it again, and returned it to his pocket.

As he did so, Jernigan returned.

"It's all right," he said, as the automobile started on again. "If the question is asked, it will be properly answered. Now, tell me why you did that acrobatic feat."

"I did it because I saw something lying out on the lawn that was not there when we entered the house—and I didn't want his nibs to see it, too."

"What was it?"

"Just a little wad of paper."

"Did you get it?"

"I didn't have my fall, and run the risk of disarranging my disguise, for nothing."

"Does that mean that you secured it?"

"Yes."

"What is it, Chick?"

"I'll tell you in a moment. Tell me, first, what you saw in that parlor."

"I saw what you did—the corpse."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing of any account."

"I have been wondering," said Chick meditatively, "if there is a policeman living in that house. Or if some policeman has visited there, and lost his night-stick when he went away. I saw one there on the floor under the couch."

"Well, what do you make of that?"

"Nothing whatever. I was wondering if anything might be made of it."

"Lots of people collect such things as souvenirs."

"True enough; but that chap doesn't look to me like a chap who is in that business."

"Confound the night-stick! I wish you would tell me about that piece of paper."

Silently, Chick took it from his pocket and passed it to Jernigan, who as silently unrolled it. Then he, also, gave a start.

It had been originally the fly-leaf of a small book, and was of glazed paper; but the astonishing thing about it was that across one side of it, traced in blood that was still almost fresh, was the written word:

"*Olga!*"

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT A SINGLE WORD CAN TELL.

Jernigan could only stare at the paper in silence for a time; but then he said:

"What do you make of it, Chick?"

"It is merely a plain statement of fact; that is all; and that fact is that Olga is now, at this minute, inside that house.

"But why should she—— Oh!"

"See it?"

"Sure. The one who makes the charge *is* an impostor. You were right all the time. And the real one is a prisoner in that house."

"That is about as plain a statement of the meaning of this bit of paper as could be made, Paul."

"Gee, Chick! But you've got eyes in your head, to drop onto that wad of paper the first instant you were outside that door."

"I noticed, when we entered the house, that the lawn was remarkably clean—as if it had just been thoroughly raked over after the mower. It was as much accident as anything else that my eyes lighted upon that particular spot where the paper fell the instant I came out of the door. I thought then that it *might* mean something—I was not at all sure that it did; but, all the same, I kept between it and that cutthroat until I got the chance to make the stage-fall, and secure it."

"The name is written in blood, Chick."

"Yes, and with some blunt instrument—evidently a hairpin."

"Tell me what you make of it, Chick."

"Well, I make very plain sailing of it. In the first place, Olga Survanieff has ridden in this big Peerless car, that we are in now, twice. She admired it very much, and looked it over carefully both times; *therefore,* when it drove up in front of that house to-day, she recognized it. She knew that it was Nick Carter's machine; and, by the same token, as Mike Finnigan—who, by the way, is one of her friends—would say, she knew that Nick, or I, or both of us, were with it.

"I suppose the poor girl is in such terror that she did not dare to call out to us, although she probably would have done so if she had not seen me pick up this bit of paper. At all events, it is certain to me that she broke out a pane of one of the windows to prepare herself to do so—and, in so doing, cut her hand, or arm. The cut bled, of course. That suggested another idea. Don't you see?"

"Yes."

"She had a book there. She tore out the fly-leaf, or one of them. She pulled a hairpin from her coiffure. She dabbed it in the blood. She wrote her name on the paper. She wadded it tightly, but it would not wad tightly enough to suit her, so she chewed it. See?"

"Yes."

"Then she pushed it through the broken pane, and between the half-closed shutters, and let it drop from her fingers.

"It dropped to the roof of the porch, and bounded from there to the lawn, and, fortunately, to a spot where she could see it. After that she kept her eyes glued upon that paper until she saw me pick it up—*and now she knows she is saved!*"

"But that devil there will suspect something when he finds that broken pane of glass."

"Not a bit of it. The princess is a wise little thing. She proved that once before."

"What do you think she will do?"

"She will listen till she hears somebody coming toward her room, and then she will break more glass, and pretend she has fallen. Doesn't the paper itself prove how wise she is?"

"It certainly does."

"Between you and me, Paul, I think that Nick is more than half in love with her. I think that is why he hasn't been near her for two months. I shouldn't at all wonder if he married her in the end. He has been a widower now almost three years."

"If he ever gets out of this."

"Out of this? He is out of it already. You don't half read what all that message means."

"Then you read it to me."

"Why, it says as plain as day: 'I would shout out to you for assistance but for the fact that this house is full of fiends, who would put up a hard fight, if they had to. There are only two of you, and you might get the worst of it; at least, you might get hurt. I will try this way with the paper, and, if you find it, I will keep silent; if you do not find it, then I will take the chance of calling for help just as you are leaving the house. But the very fact that you are here at all makes me think that you suppose me to be here. Having this message without warning to our enemies will give you all——"

"Hold on, Chick. That's enough. I have heard of people who could make mountains out of mole-hills, but you are the first one I ever knew who could write a whole novel with one word." At which they both laughed, and by which it will be seen that their spirits were visibly lighter.

"You couldn't make a romance out of that night-stick, could you?" asked Jernigan.

"I can make this out of it. I would not a bit wonder if we find that the men who went after Nick last night—supposing that I am correct about that—masqueraded as policemen."

(We, who know the first chapter of this story, realize that Chick guessed correctly.)

"Jernigan," said Chick, presently.

"Yes?"

"Don't you think that you, with the information we now possess, can somehow manage to have that inquest postponed just exactly two hours?"

"I think there is no doubt of it. The coroner happens to be a warm friend of mine."

"Bully! Bully! Will you do it?"

"I will."

"Can you take the responsibility of assuring me that it *will* be done, and so leave me free to work during those two hours?"

"I'll do better than that. We will go directly to the coroner now, and arrange it."

Chick looked at his watch.

"We can just about make it," he said. "I am due at Bracket's at twelve-forty-five, and at the hospital at one. And say, Paul, I don't want a regular adjournment."

"What in blazes do you want?"

"I want the coroner to keep them all waiting. I don't want anybody to know that there is to be an adjournment. I want everybody to expect his arrival on the spot every minute of time from two o'clock until I get there; but I won't ask for more than two hours. Do you believe you can arrange that?"

"I don't know about that. It is asking a good deal."

"We will tell the coroner that if he will give us what we ask—that is, if he will keep in the dark somewhere, and will telephone about every fifteen or twenty minutes that he expects to be there right away, just so they will watch the door for him—we will give him the biggest sensation of the century, and that it shall all be credited to his own astuteness. How's that?"

"Fine."

"Then, after we have got him to agree to it, and have arranged it all, and while I am interviewing Nick, I want you to hire another big automobile like this one, and this will carry six."

"What in thun——"

"Then pick out four more fellows like ourselves. I want men who will fight, and who want to fight, too, for Nick Carter."

"I won't have much trouble in finding them."

"Do you begin to see my game?"

"Yes; but go ahead. Give it to me in your own way."

"I think you had best proceed in your own conveyance, and with your own men, to the Willis Avenue Bridge, and meet me there at two. I will be through with Nick by half-past one, and should be at the meeting-place by two."

"What is your plan after we meet?"

"We will proceed directly to that house in Jacqueline Street. We will ride straight up to the door, and rush it. We will stop at the police station nearest there on the way, and ask for extra men. We might need them, although they can remain outside unless they are wanted; but I don't want a person of that outfit to get away."

"Go ahead."

"You and I, and those you bring with you, will be in plain clothes. We will rush the house, as I say, the instant we are out of the motors."

"Yes."

"Knock in the door, and spread through the house, while the coppers who go there with us surround it."

"All that without a warrant?"

"Confound a warrant! Nick's life and reputation are at stake. We can't wait for a warrant; and, besides, if we applied for one, they might get wind of it somehow. Fake one, if you want to; or, better, you can just tell the captain up there in the woods that you have one. He won't ask to see it."

"That's so."

"Mr. Alexander Blavatski will accompany the faked Olga to the inquest, so neither of them will be there. We'll nab them in the court-room."

"Right you are."

"And that reminds me, that in going out to Willis Avenue to meet me you had best keep to First, or Second, Avenue. You don't want to run any chance of meeting him. He'd be on in a minute."

"Your idea is——"

Chick interrupted him eagerly.

"My idea is this: That house is full of evidence. There is no doubt of that. There are also several prisoners there waiting for us. We'll get both. When we have got them, and have rescued the real Olga, we'll take them all to the court-room. We will then put them all to one side until our conspirators have convicted themselves out of their own mouths. *See?*"

"I should say so."

"Won't it be great?"

"You bet."

"While we are at the coroner's we must make sure that he understands that Nick is well enough to be present. I'll guarantee that he will be well enough, and I shall want him there. I don't know yet what he is going to tell, but I can guess mighty near to it."

Three minutes later they arrived at the office of the coroner, and, fortunately, found him there, and Jerni-

gan asked him if he would not get in and ride down-town with them, while they talked, in order to save time.

It happened that it was exactly what he wished to do, to go down-town at that particular moment; and Chick winked at Jernigan when the coroner entered the car, and said:

"Tell him, Paul, that if he doesn't consent to our plan now we will abduct him bodily, and do all the telephoning ourselves."

Coroner Bluewater looked somewhat alarmed at this prospect, but the two detectives at once began their stories, and he was immediately interested.

When he had heard all that had been accomplished by them in the short time they had been at work, when he was told of the evidence thus far obtained, all going to prove a monster conspiracy against Nick Carter, and after he had seen the evidence supplied by Olga Survanieff he consented at once.

"Don't you give yourselves a minute's uneasiness, boys," he said to them. "I know where I can hide, and I'll keep the telephone-wires warm. I won't show up at the court till you get there. Here!" he gave Jernigan a card, upon which he wrote an address. "It is only just around the corner from my court-room. I'll be there, and I'll wait till you tell me that you are ready."

"You're a brick, coroner!" said Chick.

And then they let him out of the car, and themselves sped away down-town.

CHAPTER X.

THE BEGINNING OF THE RAID.

Chick kept his engagement with Doctor Bracket to the minute, and was, therefore, a few minutes ahead of time when he arrived at the hospital; and it was not until he did get there that he remembered he had neglected to secure the necessary authority to converse unreservedly with a patient in the prisoners' ward.

But the luck that had remained with him all that day did not desert him now, for, as he drove the big machine beside the curb, he encountered no less a person than the district attorney himself, who was just in the act of departing from the institution.

"By Jove, but that's luck!" he exclaimed, as he sprang to the pavement; and in just the length of time that it required to scribble a few words upon a card he was in possession of the necessary power.

And on the way to the hospital from the doctor's residence they had found opportunity to exchange a few words in regard to that strange poison which had been used in the coffee; for it was a poison, and a very deadly one, if used in a particular manner.

"You were going to tell me about that stuff that sounds like horsehair, doctor," Chick said to him.

"Oh, yes; orsere. Well, there isn't much to tell you about it that you would understand, save that it is a very powerful drug, and but little known. I believe it is very rarely used, in fact. The first dose taken usually produces sleep, very much, or rather in exactly the manner in which the servants in your house were affected."

"Yes."

"The second dose would produce exhilaration, accompanied, rather paradoxically, by intense weakness. After that it would pass through several stages, dose per dose, and finally death would ensue, leaving almost no trace at all of the poison itself."

"Then it was used in this case merely for its sleeping effects."

"Exactly. But I have mentioned the other facts to you in order that you may be on your guard against enemies who are familiar with the uses of such a subtle poison."

"Oh, I'm on my guard, all right."

It was at that moment that they arrived at the hospital, and encountered the district attorney.

Passing inside, they found Nick so far recovered that he was quite able to sit erect, although he did not feel in the condition that an Englishman calls "fit."

The detective shook hands with the doctor, and then turned eagerly to Chick.

"Now, tell me all about it," he said.

"No," replied Chick; "there isn't time. I have brought the doctor here to do that after I leave you. What I want now is that *you* should tell me all about it."

"There isn't much to tell," replied Nick. "I had just entered the house——"

"What time was that?"

"At two o'clock in the morning."

"Go ahead. Time is precious."

"The bell rang very continuously; it kept ringing until I opened the door, and there I found a pair of policemen——"

"By golly, I knew it!"

"Then why do you ask me about it?"

"Please go ahead."

"They told me that a murder, and perhaps two, had been committed at Olga's house, and that they did not know whether she was a victim herself or not. Also, that their captain had requested that I go with them at once, as he wished particularly to see me about the crime before he reported it."

"You didn't know the cops?"

"No; they were strangers to me. I——"

"You will see them this afternoon. They were fakes, Nick. It's a wonder that you didn't tumble."

"Their uniforms were all right. They wore the correct precinct numbers. They brought me news of a murder. Why should I think them fakes?"

"That is right."

"How did you go to Olga's house?"

"In a hack. I remember now that I noticed that we went along almost without noise at all, and I also remember of wondering vaguely if the horses, as well as the wheels, were rubber-tired; but I was anxious about Olga; about what they had told me, and I did not pay much attention to other things."

"And then what? When you arrived at the house?"

"I think there were two other policemen there. I am not sure. I was taken directly to a rear room on the second floor."

"Four policemen, eh? That gives me an idea that I shall have only three to contend against in Jacqueline Street. Good! Now, what did you find in the room you entered?"

"Yvonne had been stabbed to death by a dagger exactly like mine——"

"It *was* yours."

"Eh?"

"Never mind now. Where was the body, and what was the condition of the room?"

"The body was lying on the couch, as if sleeping; the condition of the room was irreproachable."

"Now, tell me how you happened to take your dagger out of the safe, and what you did with it."

"Several days ago, a gentleman called—a collector of curios. He brought a letter from Olga, asking me to loan it to him for a few days, in order that he might compare the workmanship with some other in his possession. He also asked me if I had a curious belt and sheath which I could lend him at the same time, and I searched one out of the chest for him."

"Where is the letter from Olga that he took to you?"

"I don't know. On my desk, I suppose."

"Not at all. I have searched a little for such a letter. It may be there, but I doubt it. That chap managed to steal it again after you had laid it down—probably while you were after the belt and sheath. That is probably why he asked for the latter articles—in order that he might get an opportunity to steal the letter."

"All your talk is a mystery to me, Chick. I know nothing of the circumstances."

"It is no mystery to me. So you let him go away with the dagger and the other things, eh?"

"Why, yes. It was Olga's request."

"Only it happens that the letter was forged, of course. You will know the whole story later. Now, what knocked you out?"

"Lightning, I should say, from the effect it has had upon me. I scarcely know what I am about yet."

"No wonder."

"I had barely entered the room. I remember hearing something behind me, and then I was struck. I did not know another thing till I woke up here in this place—the prison ward of Bellevue."

"Nick, it was altogether the most damnable plot that was ever hatched in the history of the world. The doctor will tell you part of it, and I will tell you all about it after our case is finished. The inquest is called for two o'clock."

"Yes. I have already been notified that I would have to attend a coroner's inquest at two, and I supposed that somehow I was charged with the murder. But I really haven't taken the thing seriously."

"You came mighty near to being obliged to take it seriously. But I must go."

"You will be at the inquest, Chick?"

"*Be there!* Well, I should say I would! But, Nick."

"Yes."

"I'll be late. The whole thing will be late, as a matter of fact. You are not supposed to know that, however."

"All right."

Chick leaned nearer to him, and half whispered:

"You are not likely to see much of me before four o'clock, or very near it. But don't get impatient."

He turned to the doctor then.

"Doctor," he asked, "will you stay with Nick, and go with him, as his physician, to the coroner's?"

"That is my intention. Wild horses couldn't haul me away."

"And will you tell him all the story, just as you know it?"

"Sure."

"Then I will leave you together. I haven't another moment to spare."

With scarcely a backward glance, the young detective turned away, and dashed out of the building and into the automobile.

He had already divested himself of a part of the disguise he had worn since his visit to the house in the Bronx, and now, as he sped along, he managed to restore himself to his natural appearance.

Never in all his life had he worked so hard or so bravely as he had done that day, and yet he experienced no sense of fatigue; rather, his feeling was one of thorough exhilaration for the success he had attained.

He clung closely to the east side of the city all the way to the appointed place of meeting with Jernigan and his men; and it is a remarkable fact that both automobiles arrived at the Willis Avenue Bridge at the same moment.

There were four selected men with Jernigan in the other machine, and so Chick called to the latter to get in with him; that done, they led the way up the avenue toward their destination.

"Everything is working to a charm, Paul," said Chick, as they sped along, making good time. "Did you attend to everything?"

"Yes. I even telephoned to the Bronx station-house that we would want half a dozen reserves when we arrived there."

"Good!"

"The captain was frightened at first. Thought we were going to make a raid over his head, but I reassured him on that point."

"And then I suppose he wanted to know what you wanted of the men?"

"Sure. And I told him—nit. I told him that I would tell him when we got there."

"Do you remember what I said about that night-stick we saw at that house, and what I thought it meant?"

"Perfectly."

"I was right all the way through."

"I hadn't a doubt of it."

"Now, you understand the plan, do you?"

"In full, yes; but not in detail."

"We will go around by way of the station-house, and see that the reserves are ready for us, and that they will be on time. There, two of the men from the other machine will get in here with me, and you will return there and take command of that squad; see?"

"Yes."

"We will wait then until the reserves are almost at the house. Then, at the right moment, we will dash up to the house in our machines together—— By Jove! I forgot axes."

"I didn't. There are three sledges in the other motor."

"Good boy! When we jump out we will make a run for the house, and smash in the door and windows before they realize that they are attacked. After that events must care for themselves, I suppose."

"You must not forget the princess. One of those fellows in the house may try to knife her. Her testimony against them would be dangerous."

"I won't forget the princess. Nay, nay!" said Chick.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STAR RAID OF THE BRONX.

It was two o'clock when the men in the two automobiles met by appointment at the Willis Avenue Bridge. It was two-twenty-five when they drew up in front of the police station, having made the run out there in an incredibly short time.

The reserves, eight in number, requested of the captain of the precinct over the telephone, were in readiness, and Chick at once called them aside, and gave them the necessary directions.

These were that they should depart from the station-house singly or in pairs, and thus make their several ways to the house in Jacqueline Street which was to be raided.

They were to time themselves so that they would arrive on the scene at the same moment, but were not to show themselves in front of the house until the automobiles had arrived.

But then, when the automobiles, with Chick and his five assistants, were on the ground—that is, as soon as they came to a stop in front of the house—the reserves were to dash forward on the run, leap across the lawn, and surround the house without an instant's delay.

They were to pay no attention whatever to the six

men whose business it was to enter the house; their only duty consisted in seeing to it that no person, young or old, male or female, should escape from it—that is, unless such a necessity should arise, in which case it would, of course, be their duty to assist.

Chick had no means of knowing how many persons there might be concealed in that domicile, and his only conjecture on the subject arose from what Nick had told him of the number of fake policemen he had seen at the house where the murder was committed.

He had figured that there had been four men concerned in the outrage. He was reasonably certain that Alexander Blavatski would accompany the woman who had represented herself as Olga to the coroner's, and that would leave three of the men in the house.

Princess Olga he knew to be there; and, without doubt, there was a maid, or a servant of some kind, to wait upon her; there should also be the wife of Alexander Blavatski, although it was likely that she would accompany the other two to the coroner's.

There is an old song—and a very beautiful one—about shooting an arrow into the air, and what was discovered when it fell, and this adventure, as will soon be seen, proved to be not unlike that event.

However, we will not anticipate.

Fifteen minutes were occupied at the police station in perfecting the arrangements for the raid, and then all set out upon the expedition.

From the station to the house it was only a short distance, and so it happened that it was exactly ten minutes to three when the automobiles dashed up to the front of 123, and stopped.

Had the arrangements been arranged by mechanism, they could not have worked more perfectly.

As Chick and his two followers, and Jernigan, with his two followers, sprang from the machines and dashed across the lawn, the reserves, near at hand, ran forward at full speed; and thus it happened that at the instant when the first blow was struck by the sledges the policemen had secured their posts around the building.

Doors, no matter how strong, cannot long resist the onslaught of sledges when wielded by powerful men.

The vestibule door sank inward with a dull crash, and one of the parlor windows yielded at the same instant.

The inside door gave way after one blow, and Chick, who had wielded the sledge in person, sprang through into the hallway.

A much-frightened woman, evidently a servant, barred his passage, but he quickly passed her back of him, and thus she was thrust out of doors, to be gathered in by the waiting officers on the lawn.

Chick leaped for the stairway then, just as a tall man appeared at the end of the lower hall, and, leveling a pistol, fired full at the men; but the bullet evidently went wild, for no one was injured.

It had been arranged, while on the way over from the station, that Jernigan and his two men, with one of Chick's, were to take the ground floor and the basement, while Chick, with only one to assist him, was to attend to the upper part of the house.

It was Chick's intention to make at once for that room where he supposed Olga to be confined, and this he attempted to do.

He reached the first landing just as a huge man ran out of one of the rooms on the second floor, and leveled—or attempted to level—a double-barreled shotgun at him.

Chick was, however, near enough so that he was enabled to seize upon the barrels of the gun and turn it aside; and he was only just in time.

The discharge of the gun was so close to his ear that it nearly deafened him, and he felt the effects of that shock for a long time afterward.

When he brushed the gun aside, he also jerked it toward him, with the result that he pulled the man who held it straight into his arms.

He was a huge fellow—almost a giant—and Chick was two steps below him on the stairs, so that the man fell almost on top of him.

They would both have careened over and over down the stairs to the bottom had it not been for the man who was with Chick, and who was exactly behind him at that instant.

As it was, he caught the weight of both on his shoulders; but he had seen what was coming in time to brace himself, which he did in part by grasping hold of the balustrade.

And then, for a moment, there was the strange spectacle of two men fighting each other while perched on the back of a third man, who supported them in the combat.

But Chick's assistant proved also to be somewhat of a giant in his way, for, realizing the condition of things, he exerted all his strength to boost both of them up to the landing of the stairs.

It was all over in three or four seconds, but while it lasted it was a strange fight; but Plimpton—that was his name—succeeded in dumping both Chick and his assailant upon the floor; and then, before either of them could rise, he had planted a blow from the butt of his pistol upon the skull of the man of the shotgun.

The result was that he was down and out in that instant, and he lay where he fell, a quivering mass of huge humanity.

Instantly Chick was upon his feet.

"You take care of him!" he ordered, and then he sprang for the second flight of stairs, and was speedily at the top of them.

He realized at once that he was only just in time.

Already as he reached the landing, a second man was endeavoring to fit a key into the lock of the door behind which Chick had no doubt that Olga was confined—and it was evident also that the fellow did not notice the approach of Chick behind him.

Nor did he find it out until the young detective had struck him a blow behind the ear which sent him whirling to the floor, as insensible as if he had been hit by a hammer.

Perceiving that the man was thoroughly knocked out, Chick paid no further attention to him; but, drawing a little back, he planted his right foot against the door with all his great strength.

The result may be imagined.

The door crashed inward, shattered from bolts and hinges alike—and revealed Princess Olga standing in the middle of the room beyond, calmly awaiting his approach.

There was a smile on her face. One might have thought that this sort of proceeding was an everyday occurrence with her; and she stepped forward and put out both hands toward Chick, as she said simply:

"I knew you would come. I have had no further fear since I saw you pick up my message from the lawn."

"Thank God, Olga, that you are safe!" replied Chick. "Tell me, how many men are there in this house?"

"I do not know," she replied. "I only know that——"

What she might have said was interrupted by a fusillade of shots, which sounded as if they came from a subbasement, or even the cellar, and Chick, turning, seized the senseless man on the floor by the collar and dragged him down the stairs, shouting to Olga to follow him.

Down the two flights they proceeded in this way, for Plimpton had already performed the same service for the big man of the second floor.

At the front door, Chick called to one of the officers outside to take charge of his captive, and of Olga; and then, as the noise of fighting still proceeded from below, he turned back again, and ran to the basement.

But the noises proceeded from farther down than that, and again he descended, until he found himself in a front cellar, which was partitioned off from the back.

Here Jernigan and his men were dealing thunderous blows against the iron partition, and, even as Chick appeared on the scene, it gave way.

As it fell inward, a sheet of flame burst from the aperture; but, already warned, Jernigan and his men had ducked, and so the shots from the guns flew harmlessly over their heads, while Chick was, fortunately, at that instant protected by a brick post which formed a part of the support of the building.

It would be difficult to describe the short fight which followed that scene.

For the space of possibly two minutes it was a hand-to-hand encounter—and then it was over.

Jernigan knocked out two of the men with his fists; Chick seized one of them and hurled him bodily against the foundations of the house, whence he fell, senseless and bleeding, to the cemented floor. The others—there were four others—quickly succumbed to the officers in plain clothes whom Chick and Jernigan had brought with them.

And that effectually ended the combat.

But a surprise still awaited the officers, for there, behind that partition, was the most complete set of counterfeiting tools and plates that has ever been captured in one raid; and the remarkable thing about it was that its existence had never been even suspected.

That might, in part, be explained that the counterfeiters were not quite ready to issue their spurious bills of tens, twenties, and one hundreds; but, on examination, they proved to be of unusually excellent quality.

The country would soon have been flooded with them had it not been for the fortunate raid made by Chick and Jernigan in defense of Nick Carter, and for the rescue of Olga.

And the irony of fate about it all was that these men, who had labored years in perfecting their plant, spoiled it all for the mere sake of wreaking petty revenge upon the detective.

After that the house was searched from top to bottom; but that was, of course, done under the supervision of the captain of the precinct, to whom all the honor for capturing the counterfeiters was given.

The interesting articles that Chick found there were four police uniforms, perfect in every particular, and so marked as to represent the precinct in Manhattan in which the murder of Yvonne Blavatski had occurred.

And poor Yvonne was herself all this time a silent, unseeing witness to all that had been going on in the house, for her body still rested in its casket in the parlor; nor was it disturbed, save by the shattering of the one window when the assault was made.

It should be said right here that before Chick took his departure he gave directions concerning the case of the body, and that, ultimately, it was buried from the church in New York which she and Olga had attended together.

The patrol-wagon took the prisoners to the station; and there Chick had them lined up in front of him, and he said sternly, pointing to the uniforms he had captured:

"If the men who wore these uniforms last night will confess to exactly what they did, and will also tell who it was who murdered Yvonne Blavatski, I will promise to do all that I can to secure leniency for them from the court."

Three of the men stepped forward instantly, and, almost with one voice, agreed that the murderer was Alexander Blavatski, Yvonne's cousin, and that he had worn the fourth uniform.

"That is sufficient," said Chick. "Captain, I want to take these men to Manhattan with me. They are needed there."

And the result was that the two automobiles were soon speeding toward the office of Coroner Bluewater.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SENSATION OF A CENTURY.

The coroner's court was crowded almost to suffocation.

Nick Carter was there, too, between two blue-coated policemen, who, it may be said, did not seem to fear that their prisoner would attempt to escape.

The coroner was in his place, and the man whom we know as Alexander Blavatski was on the stand.

He had already given his version of the affair, which was merely cumulative evidence in line with the letter he had written in Nick Carter's library.

He stated that Olga Survanieff had long complained to him of the unpleasant attentions forced upon her by Nick Carter, and that she had many times appealed to him for protection.

He said that he had taken it upon himself to call at the home of the detective, and leave a letter there of which he had taken the pains to preserve a copy; and this he read to the court.

The substance of what he would swear to has already been told in this story, and it need only be said that he made it as strong as it was possible to do.

And then the coroner called the name:

"Olga Survanieff!"

A woman who wore a veil silently took the stand, and there she threw back the covering that had concealed her features from view.

Even Nick Carter stared in surprise at her, and Chick, concealed in the rear of the room, started with wonder.

Although older, she was undeniably like the real Olga.

She seemed placid, sure of herself, and extremely vindictive toward the detective; she even dared to turn her eyes toward him from time to time while she delivered the testimony which would unquestionably have sent Nick Carter to the chair had there been no evidence to prove that she was not only a perjurer, but an impostor.

She, too, told of hateful addresses paid to her by Nick Carter.

She diatribed at length upon efforts she had made to prevent him from going to her home; she said that early on the day before he had sent word to her that he would call that evening, and that she had sent her maid, now dead, to warn him not to do so.

But we already know all that, and we know now that she had herself personated the maid, for Joseph's benefit.

And then she told of the murder itself.

We have already heard her describe that once, and it is unnecessary to repeat it; she now only dilated upon that other tale, and made it more horrible.

When she was through, and was told to step down, an officer, who stepped forward to assist her, snapped handcuffs on her wrists as he did so, and at the same instant Alexander Blavatski and his wife were treated in the same manner; and it was all done so quickly and so

quietly that the people in the court-room scarcely realized it until they saw Blavatski making a vain effort to escape—and until they saw the false Olga standing like a pillar of marble, rigid, unmoved outwardly, with the handcuffs on her wrists and with policemen on either side of her, sneering at them.

And Nick Carter looked on at all this scene, smiling.

Then the voice of the coroner broke the stillness that followed this scene.

"I will now call the genuine Olga Survanieff to the stand," he said.

From a group that had surrounded her Olga stepped into view, and, without a glance to the right or left, walked forward to the seat assigned to her.

Being sworn, she said:

"I am Olga Survanieff. The young woman who was killed was my maid, but she was also a dear friend and a distant relative. We were like sisters in many respects. I was not present when she was struck down, but I was in the adjoining room. I did not know that she had been killed until Alexander Blavatski told me that he had stabbed her with a dagger which one of his confederates had procured from Nick Carter by means of a forged letter in my name.

"He confessed the crime to me in the house No. 123 Jacqueline Street, the Bronx, this morning, where he had taken me to force me into a marriage with him, in order that he might secure control of my property in Russia, which the czar is about to restore to me.

"He also confessed the entire proceeding of last night to me. He told me that it was he who went, with one other, to induce Nick Carter to go to that house after he had killed Yvonne. He said that when he showed the body to the detective, and that when Mr. Carter was bending over it, or was near it, he, Blavatski, struck Mr. Carter with brass tongs; that afterward they forced a quantity of liquor into the detective's stomach, believing that he would not recover entirely from the effects of it for many weeks. He claimed that it was a mixture which he alone knows how to prepare; and I may say here that in Warsaw, Alexander Blavatski has been regarded as one of the most skilful of chemists.

"He also confessed to me that the plot was intended to end in the execution of Nick Carter for murder, and that it had been so nicely prepared that nothing could stop it."

"Why did he seek to be revenged upon Nick Carter?" asked the coroner.

"It is his wife—she sits yonder—who sought the revenge, and forced him to it. She has told me that she was present when Yvonne was murdered last night. It was all because of the detective's activity in pursuit of a certain Paul Survanieff—my half-brother, whom you may remember, sir—who is now awaiting execution for murder in Sing Sing. I believe she gave her husband another reason, but the real one is that she has always loved that man. She believed that Nick Carter had hounded him to his death, and she sought revenge."

"It is quite true—all that she has said, and more," said Madame Blavatski calmly, from the position she occupied between two policemen. "There is nothing more to conceal. The truth, sir, is as Olga Survanieff has told it."

"But there seems to be one discrepancy," said the coroner. "How could Alexander Blavatski marry Olga Survanieff, in order to secure possession of her property, when you were already his wife?"

"I am not—I never was—really his wife," she replied calmly. "I gave him permission to marry her, on the condition that he would aid me in my revenge."

"I see. That was a nice sort of contract between you. Who was it who worked out this plot against the detective?"

"I conceived it; Alexander executed it."

"What relation was Yvonne Blavatski to this man you have called your husband?"

"None whatever. It was merely a likeness in names."

"What relation are you to Olga Survanieff, that you so nearly resemble her?"

"None at all; and I do not resemble her. My face is covered with a preparation of French enamel manufactured for the purpose. I am only very cleverly made up; that is all. With some alcohol and a sponge I could soon remove all traces of resemblance, save in figure."

"And why do you now so readily confess all this?"

"Because I wish to see Blavatski executed for failing. Because I hate him. Because I know that in this State they do not execute women, and I know that some day I shall escape, to yet avenge myself on Nick Carter. I will not say another word."

After that the doctors from the Post Graduate College were called, to give expert testimony in regard to the introduction of the liquor into Nick Carter's stomach, for it was determined that no stone in the way of his entire exoneration should be left unturned.

This evidence was satisfactorily produced, and then followed what Doctor Bracket had to say about the introduction of orsere into the coffee sent to the home of Nick Carter; what he had to say about its general effects would not interest us here.

Then came the men who had played policemen.

One by one, they took the stand, and each in turn identified the uniform he had worn that night.

They described how they had waited outside Nick Carter's house until he returned to it, and how then they had summoned him forth, as we already know. It was one of these who had procured the coffee at Charles' store, and drugged it, according to Blavatski's directions.

Two of them were actually present when Blavatski stabbed Yvonne to death, and they described the scene with revolting accuracy.

All had assisted in making Nick Carter ready for the scene which met the gaze of the officers when they entered that room.

And so, bit by bit, link by link, the terrible chain of awful evidence that had been prepared against Nick Carter with such devilish cunning was dissolved into nothing.

It appeared that Blavatski and his men had watched Nick Carter's house quietly for weeks, and that they had calmly awaited just such a moment for their work, knowing that it would come if only they waited long enough; and all they required was conditions just as they were that night—when the detective's assistants should be away from home, and when they could in some manner catch Nick Carter unawares.

"They would have waited a year—two years, if necessary," said one of the men. "I have known Blavatski since we were boys together in Warsaw, and I know that he is a bulldog who never lets go."

Alexander Blavatski refused to utter a word, and nothing that the coroner could say succeeded in inducing him to do so.

And so ended that most terrible chapter in the life of Nick Carter.

He had never experienced another such ordeal, and it was not likely that he would ever be required to do so again. The merciful part of it was that he, in person, really knew very little about how nearly he came to suffering for the crime of another until all danger of it was past.

Olga Survanieff was the first to congratulate him, and they left the court-room together, after others had followed her example.

* * * * * * *

"Chick," said the detective to his assistant, a short time after it was over, "what time did you take up this case?"

"About seven this morning. Why?"

"It was exactly seven o'clock this evening when the court adjourned. It is the best twelve hours' work that you will ever do, if you live a thousand years."

"I think so myself," said Chick; "but I never could have done it in the world if it had not been for Jernigan; and he really deserves more credit than I do, too."

THE END.

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY—493—will contain "A Dead Guardian of Millions; or, Nick Carter Uncovers a Mystery."

About the Early Numbers of **Tip Top Weekly**

We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print.

We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays."

We give herewith a complete list of all the stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine colored cover catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

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